



News Release

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U.S. Geological Survey

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Group to Tackle Unprecedented Marsh Dieback

Several hundred scientists, landowners, and resource managers will convene in Baton Rouge Jan. 11-12 to tackle the unprecedented coastal marsh dieback plaguing much of coastal Louisiana and parts of Texas and Florida.

The conference, "Coastal Marsh Dieback in the Northern Gulf of Mexico: Extent, Causes, Consequences, and Remedies," will take place at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center from 8:45 a.m. Jan. 11 to 2:30 p.m. Jan. 12. To register, contact Traci Thibodeaux, University of Louisiana at Lafayette (337-482-5712) or traci-t@louisiana.edu. Conference fees are \$30.

Coastal marsh dieback, also known as "brown marsh," is a term that Louisiana scientists have given to the rapid and unusual browning of Louisiana's intertidal smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*). This browning began during the spring of 2000, long before marshes usually turn brown in the fall.

The phenomenon has been observed in parts of Texas and Florida, but primarily throughout much of coastal Louisiana. For example, the Barataria-Terrebonne intertidal salt marshes, covering 390,000 acres, have had 110,000 acres severely affected by the dieback; 17,000 have actually converted from dense vegetation to open mud flats with little or no vegetation. About 150,000 additional acres are considered moderately affected.

No dieback as extensive as the current Louisiana problem has been observed in recent history. Possible causes may be drought, high salinities, heat, evaporation, low Mississippi and Atchafalaya River discharges, or other factors stressing the shallow-rooted *Spartina alterniflora*.

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Add 1 Marsh Dieback

Keynote speakers will be Dr. Charles Groat, Director, U.S. Geological Survey, Reston, Va.; Dr. Donald F. Boesch, President, University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Sciences; and Dr. Robert R. Twilley, Director, Center for Ecology and Environmental Technology, University of Louisiana at Lafayette. For the complete agenda and more information on the conference, see <http://www.lacoast.gov/brownMarsh/meetings> or contact Gaye Farris at 337-266-8540 or Gaye_Farris@usgs.gov.

Several government agencies and the private sector are sponsoring the conference to share information and propose solutions. Governor Mike Foster is expected to attend, and State as well as U.S. Senators from the affected states have been invited.

Sponsors of the conference include Burlington Resources, Inc., Castex LaTerre, Inc., U.S. Geological Survey, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 3001, Inc., Entergy, Society of Wetland Scientists, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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